

I am small, and needy by kittenCorrosion

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Summary:

As El adjusts to life in Hawkins, she dreads the impending trial known as "school". Mike knows just what to do, as usual, and comforts her.

just the two of them being cuties.

I am small, and needy

Author's Note:

okay so i originally started writing this as part of mileven week (which is later in november) but it kind of morphed from the prompt into it's own fic so i decided to just post it and start a different story for the prompt. oddly enough the prompt was "eleven protecting mike", but this comfort fic appeared instead haha.

i love comments btw.

As the warm summer days began to fade, El grew more nervous. It had been almost seven months since she had managed to drag herself back from the Upside Down and into Hawkins, and the thing she'd be dreading most was arriving soon.

School.

It hadn't been something she'd ever thought of, she'd been to that building before, and her experiences were less than pleasant. She'd hidden it at the time, but amount of other kids had put her on edge. Sitting on the bleachers, surrounded, had made her feel like she was lost. If she hadn't been sitting safely between Mike and Dustin, she might have just screamed and left, unable to handle the amount of stares and whispers. Her powers could do a lot of things, but they couldn't make her feel less insecure about a room full of people

This whole shitshow had started a month after her return when, upon realizing El could in fact read well and do advanced elementary math, Hop had made her take a competency exam. She excelled, her skill levels well over the averages of kids her age. That lab may have experimented on her like she was a guinea pig, but they had tutored her in academics quite well. Both the chief and Joyce, AND Karen agreed that while it was too late in the school year to start her now, it had been nearing the end of March, she would be more than ready to start that Fall.

Up until that point she'd been alternating living at the Wheeler's and the Byers's, perfectly happy to wander the houses, watch TV, and play with various action figures until the boys got home. She especially liked being at the the Wheeler's because Karen would usually take El with her when she picked up Mike, meaning she got to see him sooner than usual. Not that she disliked being at the Byers, in fact that was more her home, but she liked being near Mike more.

Upon her reappearance, Joyce had immediately taken the girl in, having to almost fight Hopper and the Wheelers for it. Hop had given in on the condition that El would get her own room, and before they knew it, a mob of local men and construction workers showed up with power tools, sheetrock, and timber, adding an addition onto the small Byers house within a few days. It was a little shaky when the wind blew and only had one window, but it was hers and she loved it. Hop had spent an entire day wallpapering the room, two walls with soft pink and white stripes, the other he painted a sky blue. The bed had been donated by the Wheelers, and was covered by a floral quilt and pile of stuffed animals. The other furniture had been salvaged and was mismatched, but El loved it. It was so different from the cold beige tiles and white sheets she'd grown up with. Sometimes she would just lay on her bed and stare up at the ceiling, covered with glow-in-the-dark stars and think about how happy she was to be away from there. It helped that every house she stayed at had an unlimited supply of Eggos and friendly faces, happy to see her. She'd already started forgetting the abuse of her past, basking in the affections of her friends and adopted family.

A knock on her door, which was always open a crack, startled her out of her thoughts and she sat up on her bed.

"Come in," she said softly.

Joyce walked in with a shopping bag and huge smile.

"You'll never guess what I found at Goodwill!" She practically sang, pulling her purchases out of the bag with an over-exaggerated flourish. She laid out the clothing on the bed for El to inspect, eyes dancing.

El looked at the clothes. There was a bright, magenta puffer jacket

with neon stripes, two pairs of jeans, a white sweatshirt with Minnie Mouse on it, and a dress. Her breath sucked in when she saw the dress, and her hands reached out, gently smoothing the baby-pink fabric. Joyce's grin grew wider.

"Doesn't it look just like your old one? I was hoping you'd like it," she said, excitement shining out of every pore. El nodded, bringing the dress to her chest and fiddling with the collar, folding the long sleeves. It did look remarkably like her old dress, well, Nancy's old dress. The one she had worn the first time Mike told her she was pretty. The one she saved his life in, the one she defeated the Demogorgon in, the one she had worn for three cold months while trapped in the Upside Down. By the time she'd arrived back, it was barely pink, more of moldy brown-green color, one of the sleeves been torn off completely and the collar was shredded and black. Still, she'd cried when Joyce told her they had thrown it out, citing that it was beyond repair. This one wasn't the exact same, but it was close enough and she brought it up to her cheek, rubbing her face against it fondly.

"I thought you might want to wear it for your first day of school," Joyce said softly, glad to see her adopted daughter so happy. El froze at those words, gripping the dress more tightly. She hadn't told anyone about her anxieties, not even Mike, but since school started Monday, and it was Thursday, it was becoming more and more obvious that she was not as excited as everyone else.

"Okay..." She agreed, hoping Joyce wouldn't notice her unease. She didn't, instead gushing about how great it was going to be, tucking the kitten covered Trapper Keeper and colorful notebooks into the purple Jansport backpack. The entire Byers family had gone shopping for school supplies a few weeks prior, and while El had enjoyed picking out new things, it still hadn't made her excited. She let Joyce prattle on and fix up the room, quietly holding the dress in her hands.

"Oh hon, you should try it on, make sure it fits." El nodded in agreement and quickly slid off her skirt and t-shirt, wiggling into the dress with obvious glee. When she first started living with the Byers, she always went to the bathroom to change, trying to remember

“privacy”. Joyce soon explained the concept, of what was considered appropriate and what wasn’t, and El understood the basics of not-changing-in-front-of-boys-who-aren’t-related-to-you.

The dress fit perfectly, a little looser in the top than the old one, which was good because in almost-year since Will’s disappearance most of the kids had started growing, puberty hitting them like sack of bricks. For the most part, El was the same, with the exception of a stack of training bras Karen had given Joyce one day, hidden discreetly under a casserole. Karen smiled sweetly, understanding that Joyce didn’t know where to start with that talk, and told her she was only a phone-call away if she needed help.

The boys were the ones who had really seen a change. Almost all of them had grown, Dustin now had solid peach-fuzz mustache that he didn’t seem to notice, Lucas’s voice dropped five octaves, Will was taller but lagged a bit behind the others, and Mike’s legs had decided that they were the only part of him that needed to grow. Before, Dustin had been the tallest, but now Mike was a solid inch above him, and several inches taller than El herself. At first it had annoyed her, having to always look up to talk to him, but now when he hugged her, her head fit perfectly under his chin. She didn’t believe hugging him could get any better but it sure had.

She smoothed the skirt down and adjusted the sleeves before spinning around to face Joyce who’s entire face was lit up.

“Oh, oh it’s perfect,” she breathed, reaching out with one hand to rub El’s shoulder encouragingly. Satisfied with her purchases, she gathered up the other clothes and threw them into El’s hamper to be washed. “Did you want to go to the Wheeler’s? You could show Mike.” El nodded, liking that idea.

“Yes. Please.”

The two headed out to the car and El stared out the window on the drive over, watching the town enjoying its last weekend of summer. Two kids played in the sprinkler on their front lawn, a group of teens in a convertible hooted as they turned the corner. Hawkins was blissfully unaware of the hell that El and her friends had gone

through to keep it safe. She snorted and looked down at her hands.

They pulled into the Wheeler's driveway and Joyce leaned over to give El a motherly kiss on the head.

"You call me if you want to come home. Otherwise I'll assume you're staying the night." El nodded and waved goodbye as she opened the car door. She stayed over so often that Karen had a special "El drawer" in the basement that held pajamas, a toothbrush, a change of clothes, and clean undies. At first she'd just borrowed sweatpants from Mike, but as her habit of staying over increased, both mothers decided it would just be easier to stash some of the girl's belongings at both houses.

As she reached the front door, she casually opened it and breezed inside, heading for the kitchen to alert Karen to her presence. That had been the one compromise, that she always told someone she was there, and she obliged gladly. She walked through the door just as Mike's mom stood up, pulling a casserole from the oven.

"Hi," El said quietly, smiling.

"Oh, El. Hello." Karen smiled back, gently placing the casserole on the crochet potholder she had waiting. "Mike is up in his room, can you let him know dinner will be ready in twenty minutes?" She fanned the hot dish with another potholder, inspecting it carefully. El turned and headed for the stairs. "Yes," she called over her shoulder, heading up the stairs quietly. The door to Mike's room was shut, which was unusual, and she frowned, gently tapping the door with her fingertips.

"Who is it?!" Mike called back, his voice cracking a bit. El tapped her fingers across the door again, wondering why he was being so secretive.

"Mike," She said his name softly, "it's me." The knob shook as it was unlocked and the door opened just a crack.

"El!" He stuck his face out the door and smiled at her, closing it enough so she couldn't see, or get, into the room. "I thought you'd be here after dinner." She frowned, not understanding why he wouldn't let her in.

"Joyce brought me. I..." she trailed off, suddenly uncertain and

insecure, confused at his behavior, “wanted to come. To see you.” He hadn’t even noticed the dress, and she felt herself shrinking inside. He popped his head back into the room, shutting the door on her completely. Then he opened it again and slunk out sideways, shutting the door firmly behind him before she could see inside, a grin on his face.

“Is that dress new?” He asked causally, reaching out to take her hand and leading her downstairs. She felt a little better as his hand warmed hers, but was still unsure about what had just happened.

“Yes,” she said, her voice growing stronger, “Joyce found it.” He stopped on the landing and turned to look at her completely, admiring the dress (and how she looked in it).

“It looks just like...” He didn’t bother finishing his sentence but she nodded in agreement, spinning her torso back and forth happily, making the skirt twirl out around her slim waist. His face tinged a slight pink, unable to handle how cute she looked. With another grin he led her down into the basement and they collapsed onto the couch, her head on his shoulder, hands still intertwined. Most of the time the other boys were here, so they treasured these quiet moments when it was just the two of them.

“Mike.” El’s voice broke the silence. “What’s in your room?” She took her head off his shoulder and looked at his face. His breath hitched, then he let out a defeated sigh.

“It.. it was supposed to be surprise,” he mumbled, “but you’re too smart...” He turned to her.

“It’s a bunkbed.” She just blinked at his enthusiastic face.

“Bunk...bunkbed?” The look of confusion on her face made his heart skip, she was too damn cute. He reclaimed his hand so he could try and illustrate, holding one hand above and perpendicular to the other.

“It’s like one bed on top of another bed.” Her confusion turned to perplexment as she tried to picture what he was telling her. With soft snort of laughter he led her back up the stairs, opening his door to show her the new structure that now stood where his old bed had been. Her eyes lit up with wonder and she scurried over to it, immediately climbing the ladder to sit on top. Mike looked away as she climbed, remembering with suddenly clarity that she was wearing a skirt. She didn’t notice, instead throwing herself down onto

the twin mattress, feeling like a bird in a nest. Rolling over, she peeped down at him, a smile lighting up her entire face.

“It’s good, Mike.” She told him.

He cleared his throat, feeling almost shy, but said,
“My mom saw us a few weeks ago... she thought this might be better than sharing.”

The incident he was referring happened after one of her bouts of nightmares. Usually when she stayed over, they either slept in the basement, him on the couch, her in the fort, or in his room, with him giving her the bed and crashing on the floor. That particular night there had been a fierce thunderstorm, and he had woken up to her crying in her sleep, body shivering under the covers. It wasn’t unusual, the nightmares were left over from her years stuck in the lab, but this night had been worse than usual, fueled by loud cracks of thunder and flashes of lightning that lit up the room. Mike had gotten up, standing over her and trying to shake her awake. She’d woken up with a heart-breaking scream, eyes wild, and pushed him off the bed with her mind, knocking him to ground. By no means was he hurt, but her panic when she realized what she’d done caused her to retreat into herself as she apologized over and over, holding her head in her hands, knees to her chest, body shaking with sobs. He’d jumped up and ran to her, pulling her to him tightly, murmuring reassurances, telling her she was fine, that it was okay. After she’d calmed down, she begged him not to leave her, to stay there and he crawled onto the bed next to her, holding her close, kissing the top of her head. They’d fallen asleep like that, and when his mom came to wake them in the morning she’d looked a little uncomfortable.

It had all been innocent, Karen knew that, but it didn’t stop her from convincing her husband that getting a bunkbed was a great idea.

El loved it, and beckoned him to join her on her perch and he did, hefting himself up the ladder and trying not to bang his head on the ceiling.

“I’m glad you like it,” he told her, scooting so his long, lanky legs dangled off the edge. She scooted herself next to him, laying her head

on his shoulder again, “cause I was thinking that maybe now you’ll be able to stay over even after school starts.”

Her body tensed at that word and he felt it.

“Um, El?” She forced herself to relax, trying to level her voice.

“Yes?”

“Are you... worried about school?”

The question hung in the air as she struggled to find words. She sighed, defeated, not wanting to lie, and flopped backwards onto the mattress.

“Yes.” She answered, voice tight. He laid back next to her, both of them staring at the glow-in-the-dark star stickers that were smattered across the ceiling, just like in her room.

“Why are you worried?” He asked. Her answer took a while to formulate, but he waited patiently.

“Too many.... people. Staring.” She started. “I’m a weirdo. They know.” Her breath shuddered out of her as she confessed. Unsure of what to say, Mike tried his best to reassure her.

“No, El. They don’t know you. They don’t matter. And Dustin and Will and Lucas will be there. And so will I. You won’t be alone.” His hand reached out and captured hers, giving it a squeeze. “And even if they stare, you can just stare back. They don’t matter.” He felt her tremble and rolled himself onto his side to face her.

“Look at me, El.” Slowly, she rolled to face him, eyes not meeting his.

“Look at me, El!” He said a little more forcefully, but still gentle, and she slowly looked up and met his eyes.

His insides melted a bit. He loved her eyes more than anything. The way they could convey sentences without speaking a word. The smattering of amber and green flecks that dappled the chocolate brown tone. The way they shone when she looked at him.

He stared her down, face serious.

“They. Don’t. Matter.”

Nodding her head and letting out a shaky breath, she relaxed a bit.

“They don’t matter.” She repeated.

Softening his eyes, Mike smiled at her, heart fluttering. He scooped his shoulders forward until their brows were touching, nuzzling his nose against hers. This was a new form of affection for El and she was loving it. Without hesitation she closed the gap between them, kissing him softly. He almost jerked back in surprise, but as she caught his lips with her own, he kissed back, his hand coming up to the nape of her neck, holding her there for brief moment.

They pulled back, and El felt herself grinning like a fool, her insecurity vanishing in the revelation of what— and who—mattered.

The sound of a throat clearing itself sounded from the doorway and the two bolted upright and jumped apart guiltily. Karen stood in the doorway, apron in one hand. She raised an eyebrow at the pair and Mike jumped down, his long legs meeting the floor easily.

“H-heh mom. What’s up?” He asked casually. She looked him up and down.

“Dinner’s ready.” She said, equally as casual. He nodded, glancing back at El on the bunk, then back to his mom.

“Awesome. We’ll be right down.”

“I sure hope so.” She turned to go, but paused. “Mike.”

“Yeah, mom?”

“You’re missing the point of the bunkbed completely.” She sighed in defeat and headed downstairs. Mike deflated as she left, face burning a bright red as he turned back to El.

“Do you think she... she saw?” El shrugged at his question, reaching her hands out to him in a beckoning, childlike manner. He jumped up so his feet were standing on the bottom bunk, arms clutching the guardrail of the top bunk, looking up at her. With smirk she leaned down and kissed him on the nose, then jumped, landing on the carpet with a soft thud. Her eyes gleamed mischievously as she passed him, heading out into the hall. With soft laugh he ran up behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and picking her up to spin her around. She shrieked in delight, giggling and holding onto his arms as they spun in dizzy circles.

“Mike! El! We’re waiting to eat!” Karen’s voice was firm, this was their only warning. He set her down, breathing heavily from the effort, but hearing her giggle made it worth it.

“Race you to the table?” Mike said casually, looking at her with raised brows. She looked thoughtful, then suddenly bolted, almost floating down the stairs.

“Race you!” She called back to him over her shoulder as she disappeared. Mike blinked, stunned, then smiled and ran after her.